

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 007921

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2012

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR TU POLITICAL PARTIES

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AK PARTY'S LANDSLIDE VICTORY SWEEPS ASIDE
DISCREDITED PARTY LEADERS

REF: A. ANKARA 7766

B. ANKARA 6880

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.

Reasons: 1.5(b)(d).

¶11. (C) Summary: After crushing defeat by AK in Nov. 3 elections, leaders of MHP, ANAP, and DYP, all of which failed to reenter Parliament, separately declared their intent to vacate their party chairmanships. With P.M. Ecevit's pre-election announcement that he will leave DSP leadership in April 2003, these resignations -- assuming they hold -- mark a significant watershed in Turkish politics. Whether any of these parties can rebuild into a credible alternative to AK remains an open question, but to be successful, any center-right party must represent, and act on, Anatolian interests. End Summary.

House-cleaning

¶12. (C) In wake of the overwhelming election victory of R. Tayyip Erdogan's Islam-influenced Justice and Development (AK) Party (ref A), demoralized leaders of Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and center-right Motherland (ANAP) and True Path (DYP) parties have signaled their intention to step aside. Even before the Supreme Election Board (YSK) had finished counting the ballots evening of Nov. 3, right-wing MHP leader Devlet Bahceli publicly accepted personal responsibility for his party's defeat and announced that he would not run for the MHP chairmanship at the extraordinary party congress to be held in early 2003 (ref A). Nov. 4 Tansu Ciller, whose DYP narrowly missed the 10% national vote threshold to enter Parliament, issued a written statement that she would summon a party congress and would not be a candidate for leader. ANAP leader Mesut Yilmaz subsequently declared that "in order to clear the path for a restructuring of the center-right," he will soon quit both ANAP and active politics. ANAP is expected to hold a convention in Dec. to pick a new chairman.

Comment: Cold Weather Coming On

¶13. (C) The resignations, unprecedented in Turkish political history, illustrate the size of the AK victory and its effect on the current political class, which is beginning to recognize for the first time the need to renew itself...or at least to appear to be doing so.

¶14. (C) Some of the resignees might seek to emulate opposition leader Deniz Baykal, who resigned his Republican People's Party (CHP) chairmanship after its disastrous showing in the 1999 elections but left enough of his supporters in key party positions to ensure his eventual resurrection as party leader. Whether any could succeed is an open question. Ciller would face a challenge by former diplomat and presidential foreign policy advisor Mehmet Ali Bayar, who has the backing of former President Suleyman Demirel, DYP's founder. For his part, Bahceli would be confronted with an angry and hostile party machine that sees him as soft on existential MHP principles and as an idiosyncratic personality unsuited for leadership (ref B). For ANAP, the tasks confronting any pretender to Yilmaz' vacated throne are even more daunting. A successor must deal expeditiously with those Yilmaz cronies who undoubtedly will try to stick around, even as he struggles to salvage an ANAP -- which, unlike DYP and MHP, appears to have lost its core support to AK -- on the verge of extinction. Similarly, the Democratic Left Party (DSP), for decades the personal vehicle of the Ecevits, is -- like its leader -- heading toward political oblivion.

15. (C) Bottom line: Turkey remains a predominantly conservative center-right country with a clear sense of Muslim identity, however variegated. In short, the voices of Anatolia, whether in the greater urban sprawl of Istanbul or the heartland "Green Belt", will insist on being heard. To flourish in the longer run, therefore, any revived or new center-right party will, like AK, have to represent Anatolian realities and aspirations.

PEARSON